

WILLIAM ARRENTS SILVEUS.—William Arrents Silveus was born in Greene County, Pennsylvania, November 6, 1875, and died August 16, 1953, in San Antonio, Texas. Son of David Moredock and Euphen May (Ely) Silveus, he was graduated from Waynesburg College in 1901 with the degree of Bachelor of Arts. In 1906 he was graduated from the University of Texas Law School and began the practice of law in San Antonio. He early took an interest in real estate and by the time he had reached his early fifties he was in a position to retire from active business with a comfortable competence.

For a number of years he had accompanied his wife to Colorado Springs in early summer, returning for her in September, at both of which times it was his custom to spend a few days. Not caring for the usual pastimes of resort vacationers, he spent much of his time in long walks into the surrounding mountains, where, to satisfy the inquisitiveness of a small son, he learned most of the local forest trees. But the thousand miles between San Antonio and Colorado Springs lay almost entirely across grassland, much of which was devoted to grazing. Practice in distinguishing differences between different kinds of trees gave him an eye for differences between component grassland species. Most striking in the fall, they particularly attracted his attention at that season and he became deeply interested in discovering their significance. To that end he bought books on grasses, a binocular microscope, dissecting instruments and other equipment necessary to facilitate his studies. With these, and without any previous botanical training, he set energetically to work, collecting the vast bulk of his own material and working on it in an attic laboratory he built in his home.

As his work progressed his interest grew and grew till it attained an intensity like unto a religious fervor imbued with a missionary spirit. Having found them so engrossingly interesting to himself and being mightily impressed with their vast importance in the economy of meat, wool and mohair production under bad and increasingly worsening range conditions, he literally sold himself on the idea of becoming virtually an apostle of the grasses.

He found to his surprise, when he first aspired to begin his own study, that there was no single treatment of the grasses



of Texas. He found, further, that all treatments were not only scattered but were couched in terms so highly technical that to comprehend them necessitated the acquisition of a practically foreign vocabulary. In overcoming this last handicap, *The First Book of Grasses*, authored by Agnes Chase, and published by Macmillan some years earlier, proved to be of inestimable value.

His goal was to provide all the essential information concerning Texas grasses in one book—information which he would make as easily available as possible to the interested, intelligent and inquisitive layman.

In order thoroughly to familiarize himself firsthand in the field with the subject matter for this proposed book, Mr. Silveus embarked upon a series of field investigations which was to last over a period of several years and take him repeatedly into every section of the state. He had hardly begun this phase of his work before it became apparent that a good photographic record would be essential. Accordingly he purchased for this purpose adequate equipment which he taught himself to use to effective advantage. In order to bring out detail, he devised a lighted box for use in his hotel room at night. Uniform light intensity and a favorable background enabled him to accumulate the excellent photographs from which to make illustrative plates.

In order to emphasize essential details not readily discernible in photographs, he employed a capable artist to whom he painstakingly pointed out such details, supervising the drawings to make sure they reflected the facts. In the matter of details which could be revealed only by dissection, he had her make line drawings from appropriate material which he carefully dissected under a binocular microscope and patiently explained. Cuts of these drawings accompanied appropriate photographic illustrations.

Another unusual feature, calculated to soften the impact of otherwise long and difficult strange words, was the introduction of common diacritical marks as an aid to pronunciation. This he did with the help of a generous and competent friend.

Still another unique feature is an illustrated key to the tribes, in which line drawings suggest the form and appearance both of the inflorescence and the spikelet, not only of a single representative genus, but frequently of two or more genera.



Thus it was that, in 1933, at the age of fifty-eight, this lawyer-turned-agrostologist published, entirely at his own expense, a really remarkable book: *Texas Grasses*. This achievement could never have been possible under such circumstances except as a result of the impelling drive of a sustained fervor in pursuit of a high and compelling ideal.

About this time Mr. Silveus discovered that the first edition of *The First Book of Grasses* was running out. The publishers believed, and rightly, that the original and limited demand had been met so completely as to render future demand so small that another edition was commercially not indicated. Mr. Silveus agreed; but to him the book had been so great a help that he felt it to be a must in the equipment of any beginner of the study of the grasses. Accordingly, he sought and obtained permission from both the author and the publisher to reprint it at his own expense, well knowing that the return of his money would be slow. This edition, a slightly modified version of the most excellent original, appeared in January, 1937, and is still available through his son, William I. Silveus, 832 Cambridge Oval, San Antonio, Texas.

By the example of his own experience of enthusiasm and success in learning grasses, and by pointing out to other laymen the means he had found useful in revealing the real interest inherent in a subject popularly believed to be both dry and forbiddingly difficult, it was his hope to stimulate a wave of interest on the part of other intelligent laymen in discovering for themselves, as he had done, that to learn about the grasses is actually both highly interesting and profitable.

During the course of his work on Texas grasses, Mr. Silveus became especially interested in two closely related and rather difficult genera, *Paspalum* and *Panicum*, with (according to Hitchcock) somewhat more than fifty and one hundred seventy-five species, respectively in the United States. Accordingly, he set himself to study them for the whole United States as he had studied grasses in general for Texas. By the time the manuscript was finished he estimated that he had traveled some 175,000 miles. This work extended in time over most of the interval between 1933, the publication date of *Texas Grasses*, and 1942, the publication date of *Paspalum* and *Panicum* of the United States.



The general plan for the latter was the same as for *Texas Grasses*; personal field acquaintance, collection, photographing and dissection, with the addition of line drawings to supplement photographs and to bring out details in dissected material.

Again Mr. Silveus, with a truly missionary spirit, bore all the costs of publication; but the high degree of specialization, the difficulty naturally inherent in these genera and their comparative economic unimportance, greatly limited demand. The consuming interest of the author just wasn't as contagious as he had hoped it would be, the wealth of illustration in the book notwithstanding. The result was that this venture was far from being a financial success—which doubtless was no surprise to Mr. Silveus.

The financial crash of 1929 and the subsequent depression of the thirties caught Mr. Silveus about midway in his work on *Texas Grasses*. Having attained considerable economic success on the principle that it is man's first duty both to himself and to society to live righteously, to labor industriously, to practice frugality and thus to achieve and maintain individual economic independence, he deplored the drastic remedial measures to which national resort was had in the early thirties to combat wholesale unemployment. He felt that whereas great industrial and commercial concerns were able in large measure to shift their taxes to the consumer, and whereas persons of low economic status escaped taxes simply by having nothing to tax, the great middle class, with no escape, was thus forced to shoulder a greatly disproportionate share of the huge national tax burden. He felt that this procedure ran counter to, and prevented the operation of, the natural processes by which he had attained success—processes which justly reward industry and thrift, and which equally justly penalize sloth and waste. He phrased some of his views in poetic but positive and forthright language and published them in an interesting pamphlet which he called *Nature's Way*.

A rugged, positive, poetic individualist with courage to pursue the right as he conscientiously saw it; a man who, having become modestly wealthy at fifty years of age, turned aside from the path of successful wealth accumulation to embark with missionary zeal upon an entirely different and financially expensive path, but a path along which he hoped to lead a great



conservationist army of laymen and thus to render a real and lasting service to his fellow man while gladly contributing his time and defraying all the costs: this was William Arrents Silveus. His eminent success in a field totally foreign to that of his profession of the law probably stands with rare parallel in history.—B. C. THARP, UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS.

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